

Council of Principal Investigators (CPI)

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 16, 2021, 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m., Microsoft Teams

Members in attendance: Armen Akopian, Gregory Collins, Lynette Daws, Katherine Dondanville, Charles France, Randolph Glickman, Asma Khan, David Libich, Daniel Lodge, Susannah Nicholson, Adam Salmon, Mark Shapiro, Susan Weintraub

Members Absent: Bess Frost, Darpan Patel

Guests: Heather Adkins (VP/Chief Marketing and Communications), Kevin Howell (Senior Director Web & Digital Strategy), and Neysa Grider-Potter

The general topic of this meeting was functionality of the UT Health SA website and Faculty/Lab profiles. The meeting was opened by Dr. Lodge, who introduced Heather Adkins and Kevin Howell. Ms. Adkins gave a brief introduction, acknowledging that the University web and digital services have been “sub-par.” As part of the initiative to reconfigure these services, a new Senior Director, Keven Howell, was appointed. After this introduction, Mr. Howell gave a slide presentation that described the changes in progress.

1. Web & Digital Strategy presentation – Kevin Howell

- Kevin Howell stated the mission statement of the department is “To manage and advance the digital footprint of our organization in an effort to present the consumer with a welcoming and easy-to-use digital front door.”
- Mr. Howell elaborated on the concept of a “digital footprint, consumer and digital front door.”
- A digital front door is a strategy for engaging consumers at every major touchpoint of their interaction with the website and digital services. The goal is to provide an “Amazon-like” experience to university site users.
- Web and digital resources were previously split between Information Technology and Marketing have now been combined as a new organization, “Web & Digital Services.”
- Goals for Web & Digital Services, with the following functions:
 - ❖ Create personal, meaningful, and intelligent consumer interactions.
 - ❖ Create a collaborative, consumer-centric organization that is optimized for driving and delivering patient, student, faculty and research value.
 - ❖ Modernize the technology suite with tools that provide operational excellence for all users.
- Products & Services that are currently supported or will be in the future:
 - ❖ *Supported now.* Social media, short-form video, SharePoint (Intranet), new site creation, website content updates, podcasts, custom web development, Email marketing, and user experience and design.
 - ❖ *Future.* Mobile apps, analytics, customer relationship management (CRM), AI chatbot, online scheduling, search engine optimization/reputation management, secure webforms, call center optimization.

- Requests for digital services are initiated in “My Service Center” (under “Quick Links” on <https://uthealthsa.sharepoint.com/Pages/Home.aspx>) after clicking on the link for “Web & Digital Svcs” in the menu bar followed by selecting “All W & D Services.” (Log-in will be required to proceed.)
- Mr. Howell noted that the top two requests are “New Digital Presence,” (a new website) and “Fix Existing Digital Presence.”
- **Discussion/Feedback**
- Dr. Lodge emphasized the need for unification of faculty profiles, because an institutional website search can often return multiple different profiles for the same faculty member. Answer: Mr. Howell said that their goal is to collapse the number of directories (e.g., profiles) and have a single point-of-entrance in the directory tree. Ms. Adkins added that the problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are various information databases with different owners and a lack of communication with each other.
- Dr. Weintraub pointed out that there are several internal sites that are obsolete and should be taken down. She also suggested that a list could be assembled of such sites to identify such problems. Ms. Adkins and Mr. Howell both agreed that the lists would be useful and can be sent to Mr. Howell for resolution. She noted that sites outside of the University are beyond the scope of UTHSA IT services.
- Dr. Shapiro brought up the problem of obsolete faculty web pages that often have publication lists that are not current. He suggested providing a link to the faculty member’s NCBI “My Bibliography” where the publication list is up to date.
- Mr. Howell showed an example of a modern faculty lab web page in a format that is easy to be updated. (He will check with his team to see what the source of the publication information is on the example.) Other features of this web page format were described, such as active linking to the faculty member’s department or lab website.
- Dr. Glickman pointed out basic navigation problems with the University website, such as locating specific information or pages. Mr. Howell agreed with this concern and said they were working on addressing these issues.
- Dr. Lodge asked if there was a charge for website service requests. Mr. Howell replied that there is no cost associated with these services unless third-party software is required or if customization is needed requiring involvement of software developers.
- Dr. Libich expressed his disappointment with the outdated look and feel of the current institutional webpages. In response, Mr. Howell presented an example of the modernized web layout and noted that the Health Science Center web page design is evolving.
- Dr. Libich suggested ways to make navigation easy for outside and inside users. Mr. Howell agreed that there are several ways to improve navigation, including search engine optimization and restricting data on the webpage.
- Dr. Libich said that our institutional internal search engines do not work well for either internal or external users, causing most people to utilize Google or other outside search engines. In response, Mr. Howell showed an example of an internal Google search plug-in to assist searches on the webpage.
- Dr. Weintraub brought up the problem that the internal Google-style search engine does not work well when using a simple term; only limited results are returned. Ms. Adkins agreed that this is an important issue. She noted that many employees use an external Google search first to find internal information. This is not an ideal situation because the target audiences are different. In addition, there is institutional information that needs to be kept private and not publicly accessible. Considerable discussion of this point ensued:

- Dr. Libich noted that the internal search engine is very limited compared to an external Google search. For example, a search for Dr. Collins using the UTHSCSA internal search function yielded no results.
- Dr. Shapiro noted that the internal search engine is heavily oriented to clinical queries.
- Dr. Weintraub concurred that the internal search engine has very limited functionality and needs to be improved.
- Ms. Adkins acknowledged these limitations and noted that it is challenging to design a search engine that is suitable for both internal and external users.
- Discussion returned to the difficulties in designing effective web sites for researchers—in particular, to efficiently display current research initiatives, grant funding, and publications. The updated lab webpage shown earlier by Mr. Howell was new to most of the CPI members. Mr. Howell explained that the lab webpage template is currently available. Training for faculty and their lab members can be requested so they can learn how to use of the template to update websites and add/maintain content.
- Dr. Glickman pointed out that another important purpose of a lab webpage is to help attract philanthropic support for research.
- Dr. Weintraub noted that the new templates for faculty and lab webpages have already been in use for quite a while, so there must be a breakdown in communication and publicity about this topic. She said that it's important to make faculty aware that these templates are available so others can begin to assemble their own sites. Mr. Howell replied that his team has been giving presentations to multiple groups. He assured the CPI he will do a better job communicating these resources.
- Dr. Libich asked about the timeline on the work needed to organize the lab websites into a more useable and modern format. Mr. Howell replied that the timeline for these services is at least several months away. Dr. Libich said that updating and consolidating informational pages must be a priority.
- Dr. Shapiro pointed out a problem of finding different faculty profiles (directories) depending on the search engine used. He gave the example of doing a search of his name using the internal university engine, which brought up an outdated profile compared to an external Google search that brought up a more updated page. Mr. Howell replied that there are many directories that need to be taken down or consolidated, and his group is in the process of confirming which ones to keep and which ones can be removed.
- In response to a question from Dr. Weintraub, Mr. Howell said that resources would be available to help faculty with webpage design and maintenance, e.g., with use of WordPress.
- Dr. Dondanville asked if the ultimate goal was to have the faculty profiles link to their lab webpages. Mr. Howell stated that communication between the services and webpages will be a key component.

Ms. Adkins thanked the CPI for the invitation to meet with the committee and said that they would be happy to have a follow-up meeting. No other issues were raised for the guests, and they left the meeting.

2. CPI Business

- The meeting minutes from the November 18 CPI meeting were approved.
- Dr. Frost was not present at the meeting, so there were no updates from about CPI communications.

- *Green Initiative committee.* Dr. Khan talked about a Ph.D. student Meilinn Tram who is a member of the Green Initiative Committee (GIC). Meilinn wanted to make the CPI aware of the idea of recycling cardboard boxes using a company named SA3; SA3 pays for the recycling. Departments would only need to remove stickers from boxes and flatten them and then the company would pick them up. Meilinn wanted the opinion of the CPI about whether labs across campus might like to participate.
- There is a one-time cost of \$500 to the institution to install the “bailer” (container) for the recycled materials and no subsequent charges.
- Dr. Weintraub brought up the issue of possible biohazards resulting from what had been shipped in some of the boxes, and if assurance of the safety of the recyclables would be required.
- Dr. France asked for more information about the operation to have some assurance that the boxes would actually be recycled.
- The committee asked for additional information from Meilinn about the initiative.
- Dr. Khan said this request will be sent to the GIC.
- **New Business**
- Dr. Shapiro brought up a PeopleSoft-related issue that caused problems for him
 - When a vendor is blocked by the State, that vendor disappears from the PeopleSoft system and there is no notification that the vendor has been blocked.
 - Purchasing then has no work-around to place orders with a blocked vendor.
- After discussion about this topic, there was agreement that there should be a list of blocked vendors and alternative sources. CPI members concurred that more information is needed about these issues, including the names of people in our administration to contact when problems like this arise.
- *January meeting.* Ginny Gomez-Leon and Melanie Zuniga Rapp will focus on updated travel policies.
- *February meeting.* Dr. Oyajobi will discuss the post-doctoral fellow policy.
- Dr. Libich asked if there was any update on the English language proficiency exam for incoming post-docs. Dr. Collins replied that a task force has been formed.

No new business was discussed, and the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.